

The Evolution of Athletic Training Programs

A look at the history of strength and conditioning methods for athletes

BY DR. GREG SHEPARD, BFS FOUNDER

(Editor's note: Although this article on the origins of Coach Shepard's training methods was written 16 years ago, the ideas are still relevant today.)

Top coaches who desire state-of-the-art strength and conditioning programs must be acutely aware of the importance of a total program concept for their athletes.

You can no longer just emphasize lifting a few weights and working out a few months in the off-season. It is much more complicated than that. A state-of-the-art program must include not only a lifting program but also just the right balance of training in flexibility, speed, plyometric skill, agility and sports technique.

Today's athletic training programs originated in the late 1950s with track athletes, specifically with throwers. Shot put, discus, hammer and javelin throwers discovered that by lifting heavy weights their performance would improve – and not in small increments but in huge chunks once the athlete caught on to this “secret.”

By the late 1960s many throwers weighed 265-plus pounds while running a 4.6 forty. (In contrast, pro football linemen were much smaller, weaker and slower at this time.) Shot-put distances for the top 20 throwers increased by about 10 feet and by nearly 25 feet in

the discus. To put it simply, if you didn't know the throwers' secret, you couldn't compete.

As a football coach, I was fascinated by these huge, fast throwers. Since I had some friends who were world-class throwers, I made it my business to learn their secret. In the late 1960s I'd spend each spring season in Los Angeles where the great throwers assembled. It was great fun to train on this program but even greater fun to bring it back to Sehome High School in Bellingham, Washington, where I coached football and track. We were the only ones in the state – high school or college – who had access to the throwers' secret. Wow, what an advantage! We had 50 football players running 5.0 or faster in the forty. Many players weighed over 200 pounds while benching 300-plus, squatting 400-plus and deadlifting 500-plus.

Naturally, we wiped up in football. Sehome High School had an enrollment of 1,400 in the top four grades, and we played a number of schools with significantly greater enrollment. In a state championship postseason game of mythical proportions, we clobbered Snohomish 27-7 and held them to minus rushing yards. In track, 11 of our discus throwers could throw between 140 and 180 feet – many areas of the country still cannot match the distances

we achieved back then.

During this time of the 1960s and early 1970s, athletes and coaches from other sports dabbled in strength training. Successful coaches weren't eager to broadcast their advantage to the world, so it wasn't too surprising that basketball and baseball shunned weights entirely, while football coaches flitted about from one approach to another. Football coaches were looking for three things: something quick, something easy to administer and something safe. Since less than one percent of football coaches at that time had any previous experience in weight training, they were, of course, terribly naïve and gullible. Here are a few of the oddball ideas coaches were trying back then:

Isometrics. German “scientists” came out with astounding statistics on isometrics. They claimed that strength gains of 3 percent a week could be made by pushing or pulling against an immovable object – all you had to do was go hard for six seconds, and repeat three times. The appeal of isometrics was undeniable: It was quick and easy, and no coaching experience was required. What a joke! It took football coaches about a year in the mid-'60s to figure out that isometrics was a real waste of time. During this isometrics fiasco, the throwers continued lifting free weights,



Coach Greg Shepard



Winning the state championships, as Wautoma did in 2008 using the BFS program, makes all the hard work of training worth it.

with an emphasis on heavy core lifts, while shaking their heads in disbelief that football coaches could do something as crazy as isometrics.

Exer-Genie. At about the same time, the Exer-Genie came upon the scene. Thousands of coaches purchased this friction-based gadget that limited the speed at which an exercise could be performed. Again, workouts were quick and safe, and any coach could administer the program by reading one page of instructions. Perfect? Well, yes, except for one thing: It didn't work very well at all. The throwers kept shaking their heads.

Universal Gym. Later in the '60s, the Universal Gym exploded upon the athletic world. The sales pitch went like this: It's safe, your loose weights won't get stolen, your kids just go around the circuit, and it's easy. I was praying that every school we played against would buy a Universal Gym because of the tremendous advantage my kids would have.

My prayers were answered: Just about every high school in America, including mine, bought one. My administrator thought it would be a good idea, and we used it for some auxiliary work. Here's what I really thought of it: "Pretty expensive auxiliaries. The stupid thing cost more than all my free-weight equipment combined."

Probably the majority of high school athletes until the mid-'70s used a Universal Gym or a similar machine such as a Marci for the primary training mode. However, as more and more high schools were becoming aware of "the secret," they began to turn away from their machines. Many football coaches magnanimously offered the equipment to the coaches of women's sports: "OK, how about if we give you our Universal Gym?" It may have seemed like a good idea at the time, but it was actually a great disservice to women's sports because girls and women can't reach their potential without proper weight

training techniques.

Some football coaches decided to give their Universal Gym to the junior high schools. This too seemed like a good idea, but this was before we found out that a readiness program of free weights should start at the seventh grade level. The Universal Gym people were smart. They recognized their machine was becoming antiquated, and towards the end of the 1970s they began building free weight equipment.

Nautilus. Football coaches were not prepared to deal with Arthur Jones and his Nautilus machines when Jones began marketing them in the early 1970s. We have never seen such advertising before or since. Dozens of pages of advertising were put into journals like *Scholastic Coach*. Jones paid for all of it, so under our American tradition of capitalism, he was able to say anything to anyone to promote his machines. Since the vast majority of coaches had little or no experience in weight training, they

took the advertising claims as gospel. It took about 10 years for the majority of coaches to figure out that these elaborate, expensive Nautilus machines were no way for athletes to reach their potential.

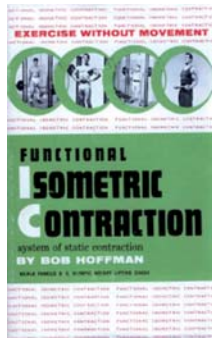
The throwers just laughed and shook their heads again. Their secret seemed safe. However, for several reasons machine training ultimately lost favor, and today machines are used almost entirely for auxiliary exercises. Here's why machines were left behind:

First, high schools couldn't afford \$5,000 per machine, so they used free weights. At first, these coaches were disappointed they couldn't have a shiny blue machine, but then their kids began having some great results with free weights.

Second, the advent of the strength coach played a significant role in doing things right. Before the strength coach, it was usually administrators or the football coach who made strength-training decisions. By the early 1980s nearly all major colleges had a strength and conditioning coach. Boyd Epley of Nebraska, a former track athlete, started the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) in the late 1970s. Books and other publications such as the *NCSA Journal* and *Bigger Faster Stronger* magazine were being published. As a result, coaches became more knowledgeable and less gullible.

Machine proponents still speak at clinics because they pay for booth space, but sometimes they are unmercifully heckled by coaches in attendance. To stay in business, the machine proponents have softened their claims considerably. Some have also started producing a line of free weights, and some take the stand that you need both.

Third, in the US we began learning about Russian and Eastern European training techniques, which were almost identical with those of the throwers, but



Isometrics was a popular method of training in the 1960s, but the claims about its effectiveness were exaggerated.

now coaches were listening because they were seeing

some marvelous results from athletes playing a variety of sports.

Fourth, the giants in powerlifting and Olympic lifting scorned machines. Even bodybuilders preferred free weights. Simply put, the machine people could never get the best athletes in any phase of the strength game to go with their program.

The Isokinetic Principle

To differentiate between isometrics and regular free weight training in the late 1960s, several terms became popular: *Isotonics* was used to describe normal free weight movements. *Isokinetics* described equal resistance provided by a machine throughout a full range of motion. On paper and in theory, the idea of isokinetics looked good, but in reality it just didn't help athletes reach their full athletic potential. Nautilus and other machines such as the Mini-Gym and the Mini-Gym-Leaper used the isokinetic principle. The claim was that each one was different, but all three were basically the same.



Athletes who start with the BFS Readiness Program can quickly progress to lifting heavy weights in high school.

The Dream, the Goal, the Glory!

If you're an athlete who wants to reach your full potential, you must squat, bench, clean, stretch, sprint, vary your sets and reps, and perform agilities and plyometrics. You must adhere to a great diet, get proper rest and keep exact records of your progress. You must attack your workouts with intensity and a game-day attitude. If you're a coach, you need to supervise your athletes' workouts just as you would a football practice.

The BFS Total Program is designed to yield great results when it is followed exactly – each phase fits together in perfect harmony. It's a validation of our program that most strength coaches and athletic programs now have a great deal in common with major parts of what we do with BFS.

Those of you who follow the BFS program precisely will have an athletic career that will propel you to your full potential. The program is fun and rewarding. Every athlete and coach will make so much day-to-day progress that emotional highs and great bonds of friendship will be commonplace.

Athletes, teams and coaches: I hope you'll strive to work together, dream together and totally commit yourself to a common goal. As you progress upward, you will see that all the sweat, the work and the pain was worth every second. **BFS**

Sets & Reps DVD \$29

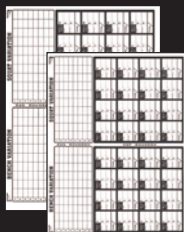
- See how to record lifts correctly and track progress
- Watch how to break 8 or more records every week!
- 63 minutes of instruction



#322039

Record Cards 99¢ Minimum 50

- 100 pack \$99
 - 50 pack \$49.50
 - Track 16 weeks
- #325061BK



Readiness Book \$5

- 1: \$5 • 2-19: \$4 ea • Over 20 \$3 ea
- The BFS Readiness Program introduces athletes to weight training by emphasizing perfect technique. A solid foundation for all athletes!



#325050

Readiness

Cards 75¢ Min. 50
#325062BK



Custom Logbooks

\$4.50 each
(50 minimum)
Build team pride!



BFS set rep cards, books and videos are TRADEMARKED Products. It is illegal to reproduce these items in full or in part.

BIGGER FASTER STRONGER

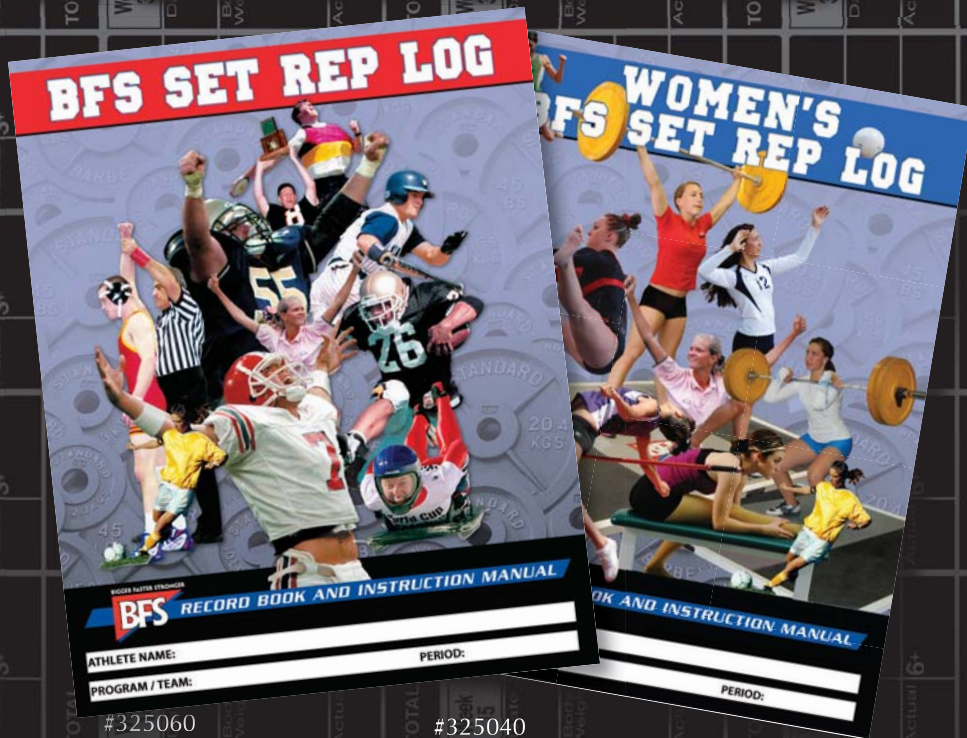
BFS

DEDICATED TO HELPING ATHLETES SUCCEED SINCE 1976

OVER ONE MILLION SOLD! - CALL 1-800-628-9737

online at www.biggerfasterstronger.com • email us at info@bfsmail.com
843 West 2400 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84119 • Fax (801) 975-1159

BREAK 8 RECORDS A WEEK GUARANTEED



#325060

#325040

YOU CAN'T BREAK RECORDS IF YOU DON'T KEEP RECORDS

Track 1 Full Year • Includes Instruction
Record sets, reps, times, broken records & more!

1 book - \$5.00 2-19 books - \$4.00 ea Over 20 - \$3.00 ea